the Qatar Embassy complex and Botswana Embassy Residence projects. The conceptual layout plan for the Chancery building in Beijing has been finalized. The economic viability of the Brasilia Embassy complex is yet to be established, the main reason being high cost of construction and relatively low rentals.

The annual rental liability on renting of building in Beijing, Doha, Botswana and Brazil is Rs. 5.17 crores, as against the total annual rental liability of hiring of buildings for India Missions of Rs. 142.16 crores.

Hindus and Sikhs stranded in Afghanistan or Pakistan

535. DR. MANMOHAN SINGH:
SARDAR GURCHARAN SINGH TOHRA:
SHRI SUKHDEV SINGH LIBRA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Hindus and Sikhs of Afghanistan still stranded in Afghanistan or Pakistan; and

(b) the steps being taken to grant visas to enable these unfortunate persons to migrate to India?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) Afghnistan has been in the grip of prolonged conflict for over last two decades and on account of this a large number of Afghan nationals, including Afghans of Indian origin have been living in India. In addition, we have also received information that 275 Afghan Sikhs/Hindu families from Afghanistan are presently in Pakistan with an intention of travelling to India. Government is examining these requests to travel to India sympathetically and keeping in view the humanitarian grounds. A significant number of applications have already been cleared for grant of visa. Government have also waived visa fee for these applicants.

(b) In keeping with out traditional policy of friendship towards the people of Afghanistan, all Afghan nationals, including those of Indian origin, who came to India with valid travel documents/passports are being allowed to stay unhindered; they are currently being granted annual visa extensions.

Government is also working actively, alongwith other countries for restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan so that conditions could be created conducive to early return of these families to their homes.